

TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF ECONOMICS, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

In traditional Africa, peace is not an abstract poetic concept, rather, a down to earth practical concept. In African Traditional Religion (ATR), peace is conceived not in relation to conflict and war, but in relation to order, harmony and equilibrium. Peace is associated with religious values in that everything associated with peace in the society is believed to be divinely established and the obligation to maintain it is religious. It is also a moral and social value since good conduct is required of human beings if order, harmony and social equilibrium are to be maintained.

Peace transcends the absence of conflict in that African tradition looks at the absence of pestilence, untimely death, poor harvest, unsafe journey, slave raid and sundry vices as the presence of peace.

The practical aspect of peace in traditional Africa is also traceable to human conduct. Traditional beliefs, social and cultural interaction imply that certain types of conduct that conform to the norms, traditions and customs of the society at large are maintained. At the centre of tradition is human life. Africans have a sacred reverence for human life, for it is believed to be the greatest gift of God. To protect and preserve their lives, all humans are inserted within given community and it is within this community that one works out one's destiny and every aspect of individual existence. The promotion of life is therefore the determinant principle of African traditional morality and this promotion is guaranteed only in the community. Living harmoniously within one's community is therefore a moral obligation for the sustenance of societal peace.

The promotion and enhancement of life is the central principle of African traditional understanding of peace. Human life is considered to be peaceful in Africa when it is marked by spiritual, material and social blessings. This is what is meant by peace in African Traditional Religion (ATR). "Peace is good relationship well preserved; health, absence of pressure and conflict, being strong and productive." Peace is the totality of well-being, fullness of life here and hereafter; the sum total of all that man may desire, an undisturbed harmonious life. However, if one processes all the good things of life and lacks a harmonious relationship with neighbors or members of one's community (living or dead), one cannot be said to have peace. Mere procession of

material wealth or progress that is not accompanied by integral moral life is neither regarded nor envied by traditional African societies.

Moreover, any action that is capable of hindering another from attaining fullness of life is considered a breach of peace. Selfish and unjust persons, even when they are not violent, are anti-social and therefore regarded by Africans as enemies of peace.

In many African societies, there may be specific period of the year marked out for promotion of peace. During this period, which sometimes last for up to a week or more, litigations are suspended while quarrels and all forms of violent and unjust acts are avoided for fear of incurring the wrath of the gods, ancestors and deities. This sacred period sometimes precedes the planting seasons and it is believed that any breach of peace at a time like that will lead to poor harvest.

Wars and Conflict in Africa

Wars were not usually fought for the sake of might. Even in the event of provocation by a neighboring community, attempt was first made to negotiate and resolve the problem without resorting to armed conflict. This being value traditional Africa attached to human life. There were of course, several inter-clan wars and raids in Africa before the European slave trade, colonial conquests and current globalization trends have raised violent conflict to a dimension never dreamt of in traditional Africa. Hence, violence and breach of peace has become permanent feature of contemporary African reality. Traditional Africa viewed war as morally unacceptable, since it was a total collapse of social order and harmony. In fact, Robert Smith, observed wars in pre-colonial Africa and opined that they were mere 'skirmishes' and not wars. Wars were said to be suspended in planting and harvest seasons. Thus, amicable solutions might have been sought before resumption of violence could be considered.

Other domestic and social conflicts were managed such that resolution was possible. The concept of village square and Kings' yard meetings were common features in the olden days, where issues were raised and resolved amicably and transparently. Most

of the time, aggrieved parties were called together and they were made to drink palm wine together in the same calabash and kola nuts were broken and shared between them. These gestures symbolized an end to impasse and everybody went home happy.

CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA

Since justice is the prerequisite for peace, peace then is a major condition for development. Africans hardly ever talked of development without founding it on peace. In a culture that sees development as divine blessing, it is impossible to think of true progress in the midst of moral, social and cosmic disorder. Due to the superstitious nature of traditional Africa, peace was considered a divine gift. Thus, all effort was put in place to maintain the social equilibrium that guaranteed smooth interaction with divinity.

Development was viewed from social or moral, economic and personal or spiritual perspectives. The social and moral aspect deals with the maintenance of social order and sanctity of social justice and moral obligations. From economic viewpoint, high yield on farm produce, hunting expenditures, and profitable trade relations are considered factors of development in traditional African society. Finally, the spiritual tenet of the people required the belief that all occurrences – good or bad – was ordained and sanctioned by a Supreme Being. The idea of 'chance or coincidence' was alien to traditional Africa. Therefore, a breach of social order and harmony was believed to attract the wrath of the gods who in turn have the capability to hinder development.